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INFO RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 4843
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 5080
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0229
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 3076
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1260
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 002677

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2016

TAGS: PREF UN CH NP

SUBJECT: CHINESE SHOOTING SPREE RESULTS IN ONE DEAD TIBETAN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Nicholas Dean. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) UNHCR confirmed to us that, on October 1, approximately 75 Tibetans trying to cross into Nepal via the Nangpa La pass (north-east Nepal near Mt. Everest) came under 20 minutes of fire from a Chinese patrol that resulted in one death and one injury. Forty-three of the Tibetans arrived safely at the Tibetan Reception Center (TRC) in Kathmandu on October 10. UNHCR reports that the Government of Nepal (GON) has been very cooperative and that the Embassy of India in Nepal has pledged to process the Tibetans for onward travel to India. UNHCR hopes the group will be able to travel to India early the week of October 16.

CHINESE PATROL FIRED ON GROUP FOR TWENTY MINUTES

¶2. (C) Douglas DiSalvo, Associate Protection Officer at UNHCR, told Emboff that on October 10 he had interviewed several of the 43 members of the group of Tibetans that managed to escape across the border of China into Nepal. Those interviewed by DiSalvo recounted that on the morning of October 1, a seven-man Chinese patrol caught up with the tail end of the group, ordered them to stop, then fired indiscriminately at the group of 75 refugees for over 20 minutes. A young woman, a 20-25 year old nun, was shot twice and died almost immediately. Another young man was shot in the leg and was presumed to have been arrested by the Chinese. Thirty Tibetans did not make it across the border and were presumed arrested. DiSalvo mentioned that 10-12 of the group, young children, were caught immediately. Several of those interviewed recounted a chaotic and disturbing scene of people running through the snow with little place to hide as bullets whizzed by. DiSalvo noted that only two of the seven Chinese had weapons and stressed that the shooting took place on the Chinese side of the border. He mentioned that any decisions to take the issue up with the Chinese would come from UNHCR headquarters in Geneva, but said he was not aware of any action at this time. Several members of the group told the Associate Protection Officer they saw dozens of foreigners climbing nearby Cho Oyu peak and that the climbers "may have taken pictures" of the shooting.

LARGE GROUP MAY HAVE BEEN REASON FOR DETECTION

¶13. (C) DiSalvo said that several of the 43 noted that a group of 75 was larger than most groups heading for Nepal. Group members explained they had been traveling at night to avoid detection for 13 nights. One interviewee recounted that, on the night of September 30, the group had difficulty following the path and had needed to shout at each other more than usual to stick together. More than one of the 43 suspected that a Chinese patrol had heard them at night and thus had been able to locate the group the morning of October 1.

GOVERNMENTS OF NEPAL AND INDIA COOPERATIVE

¶14. (C) DiSalvo explained to Emboff that 43 of the 75 Tibetans had safely arrived at the TRC in Kathmandu the morning of October 10. He noted that GON officials had been cooperative with allowing the group to travel to Kathmandu. DiSalvo said that Indian Embassy officials were interested in interviewing some of the group, but indicated they were willing to process the refugees in a timely fashion. UNHCR hoped to have the group of 43 processed and ready to travel by early the week of October 16.

CHINESE PATROLS INCREASE, BUT SHOOTING OUT OF CHARACTER

¶15. (C) DiSalvo said that his Tibetan contacts reported that arrests by Chinese patrols on the Nepal border have been on the rise lately. According to DiSalvo's Tibetan sources, as many as 900 Tibetans were being processed at the Shigatse prison for attempting to cross into Nepal (a larger than usual number). His sources told him that Chinese patrols normally fire into the air to force Tibetans trying to cross illegally to stop walking and that such brazen firing was unexplainable. Members of the group said they knew of no particular individuals of interest that would have made their group a specific target of Chinese patrols.

COMMENT

¶16. (C) The seemingly indiscriminate shooting of Tibetans attempting to cross into Nepal is a potential embarrassment to China. We will watch closely for interaction between the Chinese and Nepali governments over this issue. UNHCR Resident Representative Abraham Abraham sent U.S. and other international donors a letter on October 10 promising to keep everyone posted of any further developments regarding the 43 Tibetans that made it to Nepal or the whereabouts of the approximately 30 that did not. Post will follow up with UNHCR to ensure that the 43 make it safely to India.

DEAN